

Abundant supply yields bonus for clammers

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DUXBURY

DUXBURY — Thanks to an abundance of shellfish on Duxbury's coast, professional and amateur clammers are enjoying another bonus season this month.

Twenty years ago there were practically no soft-shelled clams in Duxbury, said Harbormaster Donald Beers. Today he has the responsibility of ensuring that enough shellfish are harvested to keep them from overtaxing their habitat.

The regular season for shellfish normally spans April, May, September and October, but the supply has been high enough to allow Beers to open soft-shelled clam and quahog clam harvesting each month this summer.

"Our stocks are high enough right now" to allow the bonus season, Beers said. "It's part of the management plan to thin these populations out. If you don't, they get too large, or get a disease and sour the bed. We look at it very carefully."

On any given Wednesday, the only day of the week that softshell clams can be cultivated this month, 150 residents might be peppered along the town's miles of shoreline, searching for that night's dinner.

"Everything goes in cycles and we're at a very high cycle right now," Beers explained. "If the numbers go down we'll post more

restrictions. One of the reasons we have shellfish is we work very hard on management."

Selectmen approved the bonus season for August at their last meeting in July. The order allows commercial harvesting of quahogs and softshell clams and recreational harvesting of softshell clams. Recreational harvesting of quahogs was already open.

It's a far cry from the scene when Beers arrived two decades ago. There weren't many clams in the beds or many people harvesting on the shore. Most of those who were clamming were older and Beers takes pride in having a diverse mix of ages on the beaches today.

"We've tried very hard to keep the tradition open and viable," he said. "We've gotten the word out

that it's something absolutely enjoyable. Now you'll see grandfathers, sons and daughters out there digging."

Beers also concentrates on educating diggers on the proper methods of clam digging. Each day his staff canvass the beach as ambassadors, and occasionally enforcement officials, and check in with each harvester, Beers said.

In the long run, he believes, that presence helps maintain the shellfish population, which gives the town another reason to be proud of its beaches.

"Our shores play host for a lot of activities because it's fun, it's enjoyable, you're in the palm of nature," Beers said. "That's exactly what it's all about. There's nothing better than a steamed Duxbury clam."